

Thrill-Ride Tragedy Will Not Affect N.J. Teen Loses Feet at Kentucky Park

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Six Flags and another company shut down nine thrill rides Friday across the country after a teenage girl had her feet chopped off at the ankle on the Superman Tower of Power ride at Six Flags Kentucky Kingdom.

New Jersey officials said Friday that the incident in Kentucky would have no effect on amusement park operations here because of high inspection standards and the fact that there is no similar ride located anywhere in the state.

Inspectors visited Six Flags Kentucky Kingdom to examine the ride, which lifts passengers 177 feet straight up, then drops them nearly the same distance at speeds reaching 54 mph.

Bill Clary, a spokesman for the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, which inspects amusement-park rides, said a cause had not been determined Friday afternoon.

It was unclear at what point during the ride the 13-year-old was injured Thursday, said Wendy Goldberg, a Six Flags spokeswoman. The girl was taken to a hospital, but was not identified, and details of her condition were not available Friday.

Six Flags shut down similar rides at parks in St. Louis, Gurnee, Ill., and near Washington, D.C., as a safety precaution, Goldberg said.

There were no reports of injuries on the ride before Thursday, she said.

"Millions of people have safely ridden this ride in our parks," Goldberg said.

Cedar Fair Entertainment Co. shut down drop-tower rides at five of its amusement parks in Ohio, Virginia, North Carolina, California and Toronto as a precaution, company spokeswoman Stacy Frole said.

Intamin AG, a Swiss company, made all the rides but did not supply all the parts, said Sandor Kernacs, president of the company's American operations, Intamin Ltd. in Glen Burnie, Md.

Operations at Six Flags Great Adventure in Jackson Township, Ocean County, were running normally on Friday.

That park fielded many calls Friday from customers asking if it has a Superman Tower of Power ride. It has no such ride, though it does operate a Superman-themed roller coaster, said spokeswoman Angel Ariston.

Great Adventure's only drop-tower ride and one of the park's original attractions, Stuntman's Freefall, was removed last year to make room for eventual expansion.

Freefall used a different operating system than the ride in Kentucky, as does the AtmosFEAR drop tower ride at Morey's Piers in Wildwood, said park spokeswoman Angel Daniels. That amusement park also was operating normally Friday.

New Jersey's standards for amusement park rides are unlike any in the country, said Bill Connolly, director of the state Department of Community Affairs' Division of Codes and Standards, which oversees ride safety and inspection.

The division undertakes detailed engineering analyses and imposes a design code, "like a building code for rides," Connolly said.

Because New Jersey takes a scientific approach in predicting and preventing problems, "when something like that happens elsewhere, we shouldn't have to scramble."

The design code was introduced after a fatal roller coaster accident in 1999, in which a mother and her 8-year-old daughter were thrown from a coaster at Gillian's Wonderland Pier in Ocean City, Connolly said.

Statistics show that the code has worked, he said. In 1997, there were 24 serious ride accidents that resulted in injuries such as broken bones. In 2006, there were three.